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NEWSWEEK
1 September 1980

The Admiral Runs Aground

The Citadel, which proudly calls itself the "West Point of the South," broke a 138-year tradition last summer by appointing a Navy man as president. But he was no ordinary seaman. Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, 56, is an Annapolis classmate of Jimmy Carter and CIA director Stansfield Turner, a Medal of Honor winner, the man who organized American prisoner-of-war resistance during his nearly eight years in Hanoi prisons—and a scholar as comfortable with the works of Aristotle as with those of Alfred Thayer Mahan. Last week, five days short of a year, the union between the hoary South Carolina military college and the cerebral war hero collapsed. After submitting a one-sentence letter of resignation and packing his gear, Stockdale said in dismay, "The place is locked in pre-Civil War concrete."

The admiral ran into conflict early. Last fall, after interviewing freshmen who had washed out, Stockdale became convinced that the hazing of freshmen (called "knobs" for their skinhead haircuts) had reached dangerous levels. In the spring a drunken senior brandished a loaded pistol during an all-night hazing of terrified knobs. Stockdale ordered the cadet expelled; the board of trustees overruled the president and allowed the cadet to graduate. "I'm not opposed to hazing," Stockdale says. "Hell, I understand the value of the plebe year. I learned that in Hanoi, but I wanted to have a throttle on the system." He offered reforms of the hazing program that would have taken away some of the control from the students, but after cadet leaders and alumni complained, the board backed off. "You would have thought I was tampering with America," Stockdale says.

In reality, the conflict lay between a gladiator who saw his role as bringing The Citadel into the twentieth century and a board of trustees that regards itself as the last redoubt of the institution's noble traditions. At The Citadel, cadets still wear uniforms to class and march to meals and "lights out" for knobs is at midnight. Stockdale did not try to change those traditions; he finally ran aground over the issue of administrative reorganization.

Armed with a Price Waterhouse study criticizing management weaknesses, the admiral proposed a new command structure. He wanted to strengthen the admissions department, sending recruiters out to dispel

the school's "macho image" and "attract bright, scholarly boys." And he wanted to reshuffle some of his subordinates, an authority Stockdale thought a commanding officer should have. But the changes would have unseated some entrenched Citadel bureaucrats, and the board tabled the plan. As one trustee explained it, "We were moving too fast."

A Hard Question: Ultimately, Stockdale had hoped to liberalize the curriculum as he had at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., a prestigious command he gave up to take The Citadel post once held by



Tom Spain—Charleston News & Courier

Clark, Stockdale: 'Locked in pre-Civil War concrete'

the revered Gen. Mark Clark. To Newport's basic courses in naval strategy and management, Stockdale added electives in the humanities; he himself taught a course in moral philosophy, drawing on his experiences as a POW and his study of the classical philosophers. "I was always being asked by the Navy brass what a destroyer skipper needs to know about Immanuel Kant," Stockdale says. He calls that a hard question because it takes a while to answer properly. But last week as he was pondering other academic appointments already offered, the admiral said there was a short version: "A liberally educated person meets new ideas with curiosity and fascination. An illiberally educated person meets new ideas with fear."

GIL SEWALL with THOMAS M. DeFRANK
in Washington and bureau reports.